

The Anti-racist Dictionary

By Dr. Akilah Cadet

Allyship: Entry-level stage of researching and advocating for BIPOC. Allyship is the start of recognizing and calling out microaggressions and discrimination. This looks like actively listening, immersing yourself in learning (books, podcasts, workshops) about the community to advocate for, starting to speak up, and practicing advocating for the least represented when no one is watching. Being an Accomplice is the next step.

Accomplice: Someone who is actively aware and mindful of their privileges and how they add to systemic and institutional racism and oppression of BIPOC. Vocal about stereotypes and racial injustice, while showing up personally and professionally in a way that helps dismantle white supremacy. This looks like someone who brushes their teeth, puts on their deodorant and checks their own privilege. This is someone who is not afraid to make mistakes and will do all they can to not add to systemic and institutional racism, oppression, and no longer uphold values of white supremacy.

All Lives Matter: An ideology that developed in retaliation of the Black Lives Matter that criticizes the movement for highlighting the injustices toward Black people. Some see it as an unnecessary effort to spotlight the value of Black lives, All Lives Matter is a movement that attempts to silence issues of injustice in BIPOC communities. Think of it this way, if all lives matter then Black Lives Matter should not be a problem.

Anti-Racism: Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.

BIPOC: Stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. This phrase recognizes how oppression is expressed and experienced differently among Black people, Indigenous populations and other people of color given their unique historical experiences in the United States of America. Pronounced “buy-pock.”

Black v. black: Capitalize the term [Black](#) when referring to ethnicity, culture, people, persons or groups. It’s an important distinction to communicate a deeply rooted cultural background and history of Black people in America and the African diaspora.



Black Lives Matter: #BlackLivesMatter was [founded](#) in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. Black Lives Matter Global Network, Inc is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives.

Code Switching: Code-switching is when someone moves back and forth between two languages or dialects. For Black people, this could mean [communicating differently in a workplace setting](#) than otherwise.

Cultural Appropriation. The idea of borrowing, sharing, or being inspired by another culture. People often use cultural appropriation & cultural misappropriation interchangeably now. Cultural misappropriation is when a dominant group (usually white people, communities, or brands) profits, dresses, acts, and/or adopts cultural practices, behaviors, and beliefs of a BIPOC community. For example, the fashion industry is notorious for cultural appropriation from white models wearing cornrows, locs, and afro wigs, to stealing designs from Black designers (e.g. Gucci stole Dapper Dan's design and now years later they have formed a partnership). [Here's](#) an article to learn more.

Gaslighting: Using manipulative psychological actions (words and behaviors) towards a specific person to make them have low-self esteem or feel like their feelings or sanity is questionable (aka making up the microaggression, harmful, or negative behavior by the party doing the gaslighting). For [example](#), a white person saying "you seem angry" to a Black woman in a workplace setting. This perpetuates the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" even when a Black woman is calm or responds identically to a white person.

Intersectionality. Coined by [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#) in 1989, intersectionality "describes how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics 'intersect' with one another and overlap." For example, I am a Black, disabled, straight, cisgender woman, with a mental health diagnosis. I am not just Black or disabled, I'm all of those things. All of those factors determine my lived experience personally and professionally. If you're interested in learning more about this, Kimberlé has a great [TED talk](#) called "The urgency of intersectionality."

Microaggressions: Incidents of physical, verbal or circumstantial hostility, whether intentional or not, that convey bias toward women and/or BIPOC. For example, telling a Black person that they're "surprisingly articulate" (implying that Black people might otherwise not be).



Non-Black People: Any population that is not considered Black. This can include Indigenous people, people of color and white people.

Non-Black People of Color: People who are not Black, but are considered people of color. This term is used to put emphasis on people of color while excluding Black people specifically. Some NBPOC can be white passing or white assimilating and have different lived experiences than Black people.

Performative Allyship: Referring to white people or non-Black people of color who present themselves, through words or actions, as though they are allies to BIPOC yet lack the intent to align with dismantling white supremacy. For example, only posting a black box for Black Lives Matter and doing nothing else to further advocate for dismantling white supremacy.

White Privilege. When asked how to define “white privilege,” Dr. Cadet breaks it down like this:

- **Privilege:** Privilege is characteristically invisible to people who have it. People in dominant groups often believe that they have earned their privilege and anyone who worked hard could have privilege also. But when it comes to privilege, there are two forms: unearned and earned privilege.
- **Unearned Privilege:** Granted to people in dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not, and regardless of their stated intent. Examples include: Born in the US, educated, wealthy, English speaking, white, young adult/adult, Catholic/Protestant/Christian, male, non-disabled, middle/upper class, and leader. Unearned privilege is synonymous with white privilege, but keep in mind BIPOC people have unearned privilege too.
- **Earned Privilege:** A person's ability to acquire access to a privileged space like a company, special degree, title, license, or learned language. For example, an architect can practice without a license as long as they work under a licensed architect. Once an architect passes their licensing exams they no longer need to work under someone and can approve their own work, an earned privilege. A person who immigrates to America and either speaks or learns English has earned privilege.
- **White Privilege:** See unearned privilege.

Systemic racism: How racism is embedded into the very fabric of our society, like underlying biases and stereotypes.

Systematic racism: How racism functions in an organized manner, like stop-and-frisk, biased hiring policies, etc.

Tone trolling (aka tone policing). Dr. Cadet prefers to not use tone policing, as “policing” is not the best word to use with Black people. Tone trolling is when a



person criticizes another person's emotions; determining what the appropriate emotions are for the conversation, topic, or debate. For example, tone trolling is when a white person says that a Black woman sounds "angry" when expressing unfairness at work. The angry Black woman is a stereotype that says Black women are not to be believed when emotions (excitement, enthusiasm, disappointment, fear, hurt, etc.) are present in their tone.

Virtue signaling: Publicly expressing opinions intended to demonstrate one's good character or moral correctness. In the context of Black allyship, this can be tricky when a white person is excited about or learning a lot from their journey, and sharing this publicly. The trick is seeing if their actions and words match. For example, posting a black box for Black Lives Matter but doing little else to privately advocate for the cause. Learn more about virtue signaling [here](#).

White Assimilating: People who are BIPOC who benefit from assimilating to white culture and values of white supremacy, regardless of how they look in order to have access to more privilege.

White Centering: When white people change the protagonist of the story to be white-centered - shaping conversations, arguments, situations and perspectives around [whiteness](#) and the experiences and culture of white people. This is used to evade accountability and disregard the experiences of BIPOC. A few examples of white centering:

- A white person who says All Lives Matter, changing the protagonist from Black people to all people and silencing Black voices in the process
- When a Black person expresses to a white person that an action was harmful to them, and the white person becomes defensive, explaining that they aren't racist and didn't mean it that way (rather than listening, learning and acknowledging)

White Passing: People who are BIPOC and their physical appearance allows them to pass or look as though they are white. This shapes how they are perceived in society and allows them to benefit from white privilege, which affirms and upholds the values of white supremacy.

White Supremacy: A social structure established to uphold and maintain power and privilege of white people and white culture. This social construct has its roots in the Bacon's Rebellion which occurred in 1676, when the need to establish whiteness, or a race of white people became crucial to perpetuate the enslavement of Black people to maintain wealth and influence. white supremacy is upholding values that white people are always at the top, the best, and superior to BIPOC people. This can be a microaggression, saying All Lives Matter, or threatening or harming the life of a BIPOC person.



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